



NATIONAL VETERANS GOLDEN AGE GAMES

Local Competitor Profile

William Van Houten — Too Many Medals to Count!

Looking at his passport, you would think he was a globetrotter. It boasts stamps from such far-away places as Japan, China, Paris, Australia, London and even Fiji. For William Van Houten, a 77-year-old Army veteran from Houston, swimming has truly given him a ticket around the world.

At age 20, Van Houten was drafted into the Army, spending two years at Fort Hood. While there, a Red Cross safety certification landed him a swimming instructor job at the pool. He also worked in a print shop on the base, printing items like menus and business cards. The training served him well.

While he was in the service, Van Houten never went overseas or saw combat, but he did learn a lot about typography, which eventually became his trade. He learned about silk screening and graphic arts while studying in New York, Texas, Hawaii and Alaska. Surprisingly, the Texas native loved Alaska so much that he eventually lived there and taught a college level graphic arts course. It was his passion for swimming, though, that took him out of the country and he has competed in swimming competitions all over the globe.

In 2004, Van Houten attended the National Veterans Golden Age Games in Fresno, Calif., where he won bronze, silver and gold medals in the swimming and biking events. His three-year hiatus is most certainly not a reflection upon his health, however. While he may be in his golden years, William Van Houten is one man who is always on the move. He receives his health care services at the VA medical center in Houston, but is in overall great health. He mows his lawn, rides his bicycle to get the newspaper, and competes —and wins— in a variety of national athletic events for seniors. He also likes to dance, and can jitterbug, waltz, two-step, and do several other country dance moves – just like a true Texan.

Over the years, Van Houten has lived in a lot of different cities and has won even more medals in his various athletic endeavors. “I’ve started giving them away,” he said. His winning strategy is simple, saying, “You just need to keep outliving everyone!” Although he now competes in the second eldest age bracket at the Golden Age Games, it seems that skill and training still have a lot to do with his success. He trains both in the water and on land, biking about four to five miles each day. After more than a quarter century, swimming remains his favorite event. “It’s about the only sport you can do laying down,” he says. “And it helps beat the heat.”

Hot weather is something Van Houten and his fellow teammates know all too well, as summers in Texas can be sizzling. At this year’s Golden Age Games, he and his local teammates will have no problem giving visiting participants a very warm welcome to Houston, since the city is hosting this year’s National Veterans Golden Age Games. “I loved to travel,” he said. “But Houston — this is home.”

